PORTRAYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL WORK IN SOFTWARE DEVELOPER JOB ADVERTISEMENTS IN BULGARIA

DIMITROVA-GIRGITSOVA Ani (1)

(1) Bulgarian Academy of Science, Institute of Population and Human Studies

Address correspondence to: Ani Girgitsova-Dimitrova; Bulgarian Academy of Science, Institute of Population and Human Studies, Department of Social, Work and Counseling Psychology; Address: Bulgaria, Sofia 1113, Akad. G. Bonchev St, bl. 6; Ph: +359889822778; Email: Girgitsova@gmail.com

Abstract
Objectives. The question that the article attempts to answer is whether and how the opportunities for meaningful work could be positioned as a competitive advantage in job advertisements. A specific focus is the software development job market in Bulgaria.
Material and methods. Content analysis was applied to a sample of 60 job advertisements using the keywords "software engineer" and "software developer". All selected job advertisements included a part describing what the company offers to its potential new hires. This specific part of the job advertisement was analyzed through manual coding of phrases. The coding was drawn from the Meaningful Work Framework model developed by Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) and Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012), including "Unity with Others", "Developing and Becoming Self", "Expressing Full Potential", "Service to Others".
Results. The majority (64%) of the phrases related to meaningful work could be linked to "Expressing Full Potential". "Unity to Others" could be identified as a theme in 32% of the phrases related to meaningful work. "Service to Others" was found in 3% of the phrases. "Developing and Becoming Self" was not identified as a theme.
Conclusion. Even though elements of the concept of meaningful work could be identified in the analyzed job advertisements, there is a prevalence of opportunities related to "Expressing Full Potential". Such disbalance could be attributed to the job advertisements' specifics as a medium to promote opportunities for new jobs.
Keywords: meaningful work, job advertisements, software developer.

Introduction

The presence of meaningful work could be associated with positive outcomes for individuals, organizations, and society. The positive outcomes of meaningful work on an individual level could be linked with work and general well-being (van Wingerden and van der Stoep, 2017), work-to-family enrichment (Tummers and Knies, 2013), life satisfaction (Arnoux-Nicolas et al., 2016). Empirical studies indicate that on an organizational level, meaningful work could be associated with a series of positive consequences, including organizational citizenship behavior (Chen and Li, 2013), work engagement (Olivier and Rothman, 2007), organizational performance (Albuquerque et al., 2014). Meaningful work is conceptualized as a fundamental human need (Yeoman, 2014), which opens a series of questions for society, including the moral obligation individuals, organizations, and institutions have to pursue and ensure meaningful work (Michaelson, 2021). In addition to the high interest of researchers in the last two decades, the topic

of meaningful work also captures the attention of practitioners. More organizations focus on offering and creating opportunities for meaningful work, giving people the tools and autonomy to succeed, and selecting the right people for the right job to attract, engage and retain them (Bersin, 2015).

Bulgaria's software development job market has experienced a sizable growth in the last few years (Bulgarian Association of Software Companies, 2020), (Zapryanov, 2020). The continuous growth could be explained by a combination of international companies opening offices in Bulgaria, the growth of local companies, and an increasing number of startups. This combination of factors contributes to establishing a competitive job market. Companies invest in establishing a strong employer brand by building a solid presence across job boards, specialized industry forums, events, communities, and social media. Companies offer competitive remuneration, benefits, and perks to attract high-quality applicants. Job advertisements are usually a part of the companies' efforts to attract talent. In addition to a description of expected job responsibilities and requirements for the candidates, job advertisements typically include a description of what the companies have to offer, including information about financial rewards, benefits, and perks. This article explores whether opportunities for meaningful work are also positioned in addition to the typical financial rewards, benefits, and perks in the job advertisements in the Bulgarian software development job market as an effort to attract applicants.

To explore how and whether opportunities for meaningful work are used in job advertisements, first we need to define the concept of "meaningful work". In the academic literature, there is no consensus over a single definition of meaningful work (Rosso et al., 2010; Bailey at al., 2018). In the context of the Job Characteristics Model, the experience of meaningful work is "something that "counts" in one's own system of values" (Hackman and Oldham, 1980, p. 73). The experience of meaningful work is reviewed as a critical psychological state that affects internal work motivation, alongside experiencing responsibility for outcomes of the work and knowledge of the actual results of the work activities (Hackman and Oldham, 1980, p. 73). Skill variety, task identity, and task significance are the job characteristics that contribute to the experience of meaningful work. Meaningful work could also refer to "work experienced as particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals" (Rosso et al., 2010, p. 95). Another definition positions meaningful work as work that "gives essence to what people do and brings a sense of fulfillment, and a pathway to express the meaning and purpose of their lives." (Chalofsky, 2003, p.74). The assumption that meaningful work involves personally significant and important work could be identified as common in the above-mentioned definitions. An additional layer of complexity could be added by reviewing the meaningful work through the lenses of time: as a steady subjective mindset that people have or as an experience that can occur depending on situational influences having intra-individual daily variations (Tommasi, Ceschi & Sartori, 2020).

Meaningful work can also be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012; Schnell & Hoffman, 2020). Based on the meaning in life empirical research, four facets of meaning in work can be identified: coherence, significance, purpose and belonging (Schnell & Hoffman, 2020). Meaningful work is experienced as a combination of these four facets. When they are perceived as missing in one's work, work is perceived as meaningless (Schnell et al., 2013, 2019, as cited in Tommasi et al., 2021).

Another multidimensional view on meaningful work (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012) indicates four sources of meaningful work: "Developing and Becoming Self", "Unity with Others", "Expressing Full Potential", Service to Others". In addition

to these four dimensions of meaningful work, there are different types of tensions: the tension between the needs of the self and the need to meet the needs of the others, as well as the tension between "being" / reflection and "doing"/action (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2009). An additional layer to the framework adds the dynamic relationship between inspiration and reality. The inspiration is related to the vision and the ideal the individual strives for. Because of the various sources of meaningful work that this model presents, we have chosen to use it partially as the theoretical foundation to explore the following research questions. The first question is whether the concept of meaningful work could be identified in the job advertisements, focusing on the section that describes what the company offers to its potential employees. The second question is what sources of meaningful work could be identified: "Unity with others", "Developing and Becoming Self", "Expressing Full Potential", or "Service to Others". The third question is how the aspects of meaningful work are articulated in the job advertisements and the specific opportunities companies offer.

Materials and Methods
        The study was conducted in March 2021. Content analysis was used in the study as "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid interferences from text" (Weber, 1990, p. 9). For sampling purposes, job advertisements from three popular job boards in Bulgaria were used: LinkedIn, dev.bg, and jobs.bg. While LinkedIn and jobs.bg are used for job advertisements for different types of positions, dev.bg is a specialized job board only for positions related to information technology. In order to be included in the study, the job advertisements had to meet several criteria. First, the keywords used for the selection of the job advertisements were "software engineer" and "software developer". Even though there is a demand for other positions in the software development job market, for example, quality assurance engineers, the study focuses on a specific job, representative for the industry. Second, in addition to the typical description of job responsibilities and expected qualifications, all the job advertisements had to have a separate part describing what the company offers to its potential new employees. Third, the advertised jobs had to be exclusively based in Bulgaria. The specific city in Bulgaria was not part of the criteria. All the job advertisements were in English. This was not part of the selection criteria. Publishing job advertisements related to the software development industry is a common practice in the software development market in Bulgaria.
        The sample included 60 different job advertisements of 60 different organizations. Names of the organizations whose job advertisements were used in the research were anonymized. Information about company size, headquarters location, revenue was not collected. Any other possibly identifiable information articulated in the job advertisements remains confidential.
        Content analysis was applied to the specific part of the job advertisements describing what the company offers to its potential employees. As part of the structure of the job advertisements, this part is often called "Benefits", "What we offer", "We offer" or other possible titles depending on the style of writing of the job advertisements. This specific part of the job advertisements was analyzed by applying manual coding of phrases. "A priori" coding (Weber, 1990) was applied since the categories were established in advance based on a theory. The coding sheet was based on the descriptions behind the four quadrants of the framework of meaningful work (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Lips Wiersma and Wright, 2012): "Unity with others", "Developing and Becoming Self", "Expressing Full Potential", "Service to Others".

Results

Phrases that cannot be linked to any framework's dimensions are 56% of all the phrases. They were eliminated from the analysis. Examples of phrases that were not included are extended paid leaves, salary and remuneration package information, office space, hardware and software equipment, health insurance, food vouchers.

The content analysis first indicated that the opportunities for meaningful work could be identified in all job advertisements. At least one phrase in each section of the job description that describes what the company offers could be linked to opportunities for "Unity with others", "Expressing Full Potential", "Developing and Becoming Self" or "Service to Others".

Table 1.

Sources of meaningful work identified in software developer job advertisements

Source of meaningful work	Phrases related to meaningful work	
	n	%
"Expressing Full Potential"	145	64%
"Unity with others"	72	32%
"Developing and Becoming Self"	0	0%
"Service to Others"	7	3%

"Expressing Full Potential" is related to creating and mastering something, expressing talents, having opportunities, having a sense of achievement, influencing others (Lips Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Lips Wiersma and Wright, 2012). The majority (64%) of the phrases related to meaningful work in the job advertisements could be linked to "Expressing Full Potential". 54 out of the 60 job advertisements included one or more phrases related to opportunities for "Expressing Full Potential". In the job advertisements, "Expressing Full Potential" could be linked to opportunities for learning and career growth and advancement, "interesting projects", challenging assignments, opportunities for achievements and exposure to different problems, technologies, customers, and making an impact. A specific challenge in the analysis of the data was whether the opportunities for learning and training should be linked to "Expressing Full Potential" or they more closely align with "Developing and Becoming Self". "Developing and Becoming Self" includes sub-themes such as opportunities for moral development, maintaining one's unique identity, personal growth. The focus is on the "inner reflective development" (Lips-Wiiersma and Wright, 2012, p. 666). The job-specific training could be reviewed as an opportunity for employees to develop and master aspects of their jobs. Career growth could be linked to a sense of achievement. Therefore, job-specific training and learning and career growth were linked to "Expressing Full Potential".

"Unity with Others" is associated with working together, sharing similar values, experiencing belonging (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiiersma and Wright, 2012). "Unity with Others" could be identified as a theme in 32% of the phrases related to meaningful work. In the job advertisements, "Unity to Others" is expressed through opportunities for team building, a "friendly team", descriptions of the work environment as "friendly", "supportive", "team-centric". 46 out of the 60 included in the survey job advertisements included one or more phrases related to opportunities for "Unity with Others", focusing on opportunities for teamwork and positive attributes of the team.

"Service to Others" involves contributing to others and seeing a connection between the work a person does and a bigger clause, typically related to social, economic, or environmental topics (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012). "Service to Others" was found in 3% of the phrases. Only 7 out of 60 job advertisements included phrases related to "Service to Others". In the job advertisements, "Service to Others" is described through opportunities for volunteering and making the world a better place through contributing to the work that the company does.

"Developing and Becoming Self", described as moral development and staying true to self, was not identified as a theme in the job advertisements.

Discussions

The present study sought to build an understanding of whether and how opportunities for meaningful work are used in the job advertisements in the Bulgarian software development job market to describe what companies offer in addition to typical financial rewards, benefits, perks. Key sources of meaningful work were identified. In the job advertisements, "Expressing Full Potential" was represented with considerable prevalence, followed by "Unity with Others" and "Service to Others". "Developing and Becoming Self" was not identified as a theme in the job advertisements included in the study. The prevalence of "Expressing Full Potential" could be attributed to the specific purpose of the job advertisements: to promote new job opportunities and attract applicants. Therefore, a focus on career growth and achievement opportunities could be expected. Identifying a considerable number of phrases linked to "Unity with Others" is not surprising since it relates to the social, interpersonal aspect of work, focusing on teamwork and building meaningful relationships. It could also be assumed that the collaborative character of software development implies the need to focus on "Unity with Others". The low number of phrases related to "Service to Others" could be further explored to define how and where companies communicate their opportunities related to enabling employees to contribute to others and seeing a connection between their work and a bigger clause. Examples include the companies' websites, annual corporate reports, customer case studies, social media, or other parts of the job advertisements. "Developing and Becoming Self" was not identified in a single job advertisement. The specifics of this dimension of meaningful work, including its inner reflective orientation and focus on moral development, may make it difficult to be supported by a company practice or articulated as an opportunity.

The current study uses a specific section of job advertisements as a source of information about the meaningful opportunities that companies offer to their potential employees. The job advertisements are usually written in a way that describes the ideal state and rarely reflect limitations and imperfections. The writer's writing style or the company's brand guidelines could also influence the way opportunities are articulated. Job advertisements also rarely circulate in isolation, and it could be assumed that applicants explore other sources of information about the company and its opportunities. All of these specifics of the job advertisements imply the need to explore complementary methods for research of the presented in the article questions.

 At the same time, another question that should be posed is whether meaning and meaningfulness "can be supplied" by organizations through programs, initiatives, job design, or "it is a condition of being human to make meaning" (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009, pp. 503-505).This question is particularly relevant, especially in the context of using opportunities for meaningful work as a way to attract talent.

Conclusions

The current study explores how sources of meaningful work are articulated in job advertisements in the Bulgarian software market. Even though aspects of meaningful work were identified, it should be acknowledged that the study uses only partially concepts of the Meaningful Work Framework. The study also uses job advertisements as a data source which could be an incomplete and biased source of information. Acknowledging the limitations of the study method and the specifics of the data source, we recommend future studies to explore further how companies in the Bulgarian software development job market create opportunities for meaningful work or prevent meaningless work, what the actual experience of employees is and how opportunities for meaningful work could be used to attract applicants.

Acknowledgments

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